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Robert Owen, A Biography. By FRANK PODMORE. Two volumes. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1907. Pp. xv, xii. 688.)

Much of Robert Owen's work seemed to end in failure. His great social experiments at New Lanark and at New Harmony, neither of them stood the test of time. His writings were of little value, and are now completely forgotten. His religious, or rather anti-religious views have passed into the limbo of forgotten things; and it might appear as though his life had been of little account in the social and moral progress of the nineteenth century. In fact the world has been ready to make this assumption, and it is only within the last two or three years that, after fifty years of neglect and even of contumely, attention has again been directed to the real accomplishment of this great and long misjudged man. Had Owen died before the twenty-first of August, 1817, when he was forty-six years of age, popular, prosperous, held in high honor by the bulk of the respectable class and by the most influential portion of the London press, and enjoying even the cordial respect and sympathy of many amongst the political economists and reformers who were definitely opposed to him, there would probably have been much written about him, and he would have enjoyed a high reputation for enlightened philanthropy through the whole of the nineteenth century. But after his memorable and outspoken denunciation of all the religions of the world in the public meeting of August 21, 1817, his reputation and worldly prosperity began to decline. He gradually relinquished the management of the mills at New Lanark, though he did not sever his connection with them until 1828. From this time Owen devoted his life to propaganda on behalf of his socialistic theories, of which propaganda the New Harmony venture was the most ambitious and most expensive item. Thenceforth the name of Robert Owen was taboo to all respectable churchmen and politicians, and the enemies of the factory bill of 1818 endeavored to discredit this mild instalment of reform by reminding the house of commons that the measure had originated, not with Sir Robert Peel who had introduced it, but with Robert Owen. Hence it is that fifty years passed after his death without any adequate biography of this leader of English thought, and only since the opening of the present century has attention once more been directed to his work.

Since 1902, however, four writers, a Frenchman, an American, a German lady and an Englishman have each published a book on Robert Owen. Mr. G. B. Lockwood's work, which was the first to appear, covered only the New Harmony experiment. The German life of Owen

by Fräulein Simon, and the French biography, by M. Dolléans, both appeared in 1905, and Mr. Podmore's two volumes form at the present time the last of this new series and the only satisfactory English biography of Robert Owen. Mr. Podmore is a frank admirer of the character, the disinterestedness and the noble optimism of Robert Owen; but he is an equally candid critic of his many intellectual deficiencies.

The crudeness of his ideas; his lack of acquaintance with the works of any of the great thinkers, ancient or contemporary; the domination of his mind by one idea, and his consequent uncompromising directness and self-sufficiency, are all deliberately emphasized. But these faults were incompetent to destroy the influence which Owen wielded through his living optimism, his unselfishness, his love for his fellow creatures, and his untiring faith in the possibility of human progress. "With Owen," Mr. Podmore writes, "that faith burned generous and uncontrollable as the sun, and like the sun most of its light and heat might seem to have run to waste. Perhaps his claim to our remembrance lies less in the things he did—substantial though his achievements were—than in the hopes which he inspired, the faith which his example kept alive. For the sun of that faith was never shorn of a single ray. When he published his *New View of Society*, he looked for the regeneration of the world to begin on the morrow; throughout his long life that high vision, ever receding as he advanced, was still before his eyes; and he died at the age of eighty-seven happy in the belief that the millenium was even then knocking at the door."

The ideals, for which Owen stood, suffered eclipse through the middle years of the nineteenth century when the Manchester school of political economy was dominant. But at the opening of the twentieth century, as at the opening of the nineteenth, the discontent with the present order of things and the divine impatience with the injustice and misery suffered by so many of their fellow creatures are turning the thought of reformers and enthusiasts again to socialism as a remedy, and thus it is not without significance that within five years, after almost forty years of neglect, Owen should find a biographer in each of the four greatest countries of the world. As for Mr. Podmore's share in this work, the *Life of Robert Owen* was worth doing, and he has done it well. He has given a more vivid picture of the man than could have been expected, considering the remoteness of his subject and the scantiness of his material, and he has outlined Owen's opinions and theories clearly, modestly and without dogmatism.

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